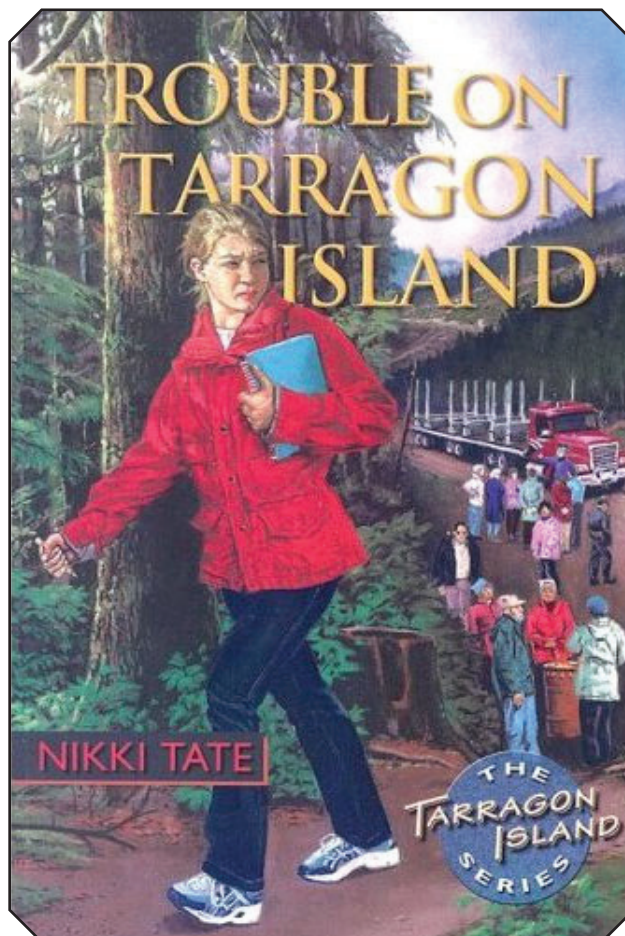


Teachers' Guide



Trouble on Tarragon Island

Nikki Tate

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Story Synopsis

Heather Blake is horrified when her grandmother gets involved with the Ladies of the Forest, a radical group of protesters willing to do just about anything to save a stand of old-growth trees from the loggers' chainsaws. When the Ladies make a calendar, semi-nude photos of Granny and her friends hang on just about every fridge on Tarragon Island.

Heather's younger brother, Matt gets arrested when protesters block a logging road and Heather finds herself involved in the battle being fought over the future of the Tarragon Woods. Trouble seems to follow her everywhere - at school her locker is spray-painted with threatening messages, at home her house is taken over by protesters, and new members invade the sanctity of Heather's writing group.

Like it or not, Heather finds herself asking herself, her family, and her community tough questions about what it means to be a responsible citizen.

As You Read

As you read *Trouble on Tarragon Island*, think about how far you would go to support a cause you felt was important.

Questions for Discussion

- The novel opens with Heather feeling completely humiliated because of her grandmother's actions. How does this set the scene for the events that follow?
- How does Heather's relationship with her grandmother change over the course of the novel?
- Describe several ways in which the writing group is important to Heather.
- How does the author create a sense of place in this novel?

Connecting Literature and Life

- Protecting the environment is something everyone is talking about. In current newspapers or magazines, find and clip three articles in which the environment is the main subject.
- What environmental issues most affect your community?

- Have you ever taken part in a protest of any kind? Why? What happened? Do you feel your actions had any impact?
- Should young people under the age of 18 be allowed to participate in protests without their parents' permission? Why or why not?
- Various members of the writing group choose different ways to express their ideas. Discuss why you agree or disagree with the following statement:

Writing fiction is the most effective form of creative expression.

Plot

- The main storyline of *Trouble on Tarragon Island* focusses on Heather's changing relationship with her grandmother as the older woman risks more and more as she stands up for her beliefs. What sub-plots does Nikki Tate weave through the novel? What purpose do these secondary storylines have in the novel?
- Discuss to what extent *Trouble on Tarragon Island* employs a circular plot structure.

Writing Practice

- In order to hone their writing skills, members of the writing group try different writing exercises. Visit the TarragonIsland.com website and try one of the writing exercises suggested online.
- Heather writes letters, poetry, short stories, and newspaper articles. Plays, screenplays, and comic strips are all valid forms of written expression - can you think of any others? Choose a topic and write about it in three different formats. How does the subject matter change when you choose a new genre?
- Choose a controversial topic relating to an environmental issue and write a newspaper-style article about the issue. Remember to start with a strong hook (leading sentence) and answer the questions, WHO? WHAT? WHERE? WHEN? WHY and HOW? Take a photograph or draw a picture to illustrate your article.

Character

- Describe three ways in which Heather changes over the course of the novel.
- Choose a scene in which there is a lot of dialogue. Act the scene out. Add or change dialogue to eliminate the need for any descriptive narrative.

- If you could spend a day with any character from *Trouble on Tarragon Island*, who would it be? Where would you go? What would you do? Write at least two paragraphs describing what you would do together.
- Why does Tate include the character of the old woman who lives near the clear-cut?

Point of View

- Though the primary point of view is Heather's (the book is written in the first person, present tense), Tate uses several different voices or styles of writing. Writer Girl, Heather's letter writing persona, and her journalist voice are all slightly different. How is each voice different? What does each voice contribute to the reader's understanding of Heather's character?
- What are the advantages and disadvantages of writing in the first person?

Writing Practice

- Choose a scene in which two or more people are interacting. Rewrite the scene from someone other than Heather's perspective.

Setting

- Locate British Columbia's Gulf Islands on a map and find out a bit about what these islands are like. Though Tarragon Island does not really exist, it is very much like the Gulf Islands off British Columbia's coast. Create a travel brochure promoting Tarragon Island as a tourist destination.
- In what way does the setting impact the plot, characters, and theme of the novel?

Style

- How would you describe Nikki Tate's writing style?
- What kinds of techniques does the author use to
 - bring her characters to life?
 - describe the setting?
 - explore the underlying themes of the book?

Theme

- What are the major themes of *Trouble on Tarragon Island*?

The Writing Life

- *Trouble on Tarragon Island* continues to explore what it's like to be a writer, a theme established in the two earlier novels about Heather Blake (*Tarragon Island* and *No Cafes in Narnia*). One way the author shares information about the writing process is by including quotes about the writing life at the beginning of each chapter. Choose two chapters and describe why the author selected the particular quotes she did. Find a chapter where you feel the quote does not fit very well and substitute a better quote. Write a paragraph justifying your choice.
- If you wanted to be a writer, what is the most useful piece of advice or information you would take away from this novel?

Science and Ecology: Rainforests

- What is the difference between tropical and temperate rain forests?
- Describe a real life process that has taken place in a rain forest.
- Why is it important to preserve rain forests? Why not just cut down the trees and, using some of the money from selling the wood, plant new ones?

Social History: Direct Action Campaigns

- Forests are not the only places where citizens have become activists protesting the actions of business, government, or other citizens. Write a report about a group of protesters. Why were they protesting? What did they do? What was the end result?

About the Author

Nikki Tate was born in England in 1962. Before her first birthday she and her family moved to Australia where she spent the first part of her childhood. At the age of seven, Nikki moved again, this time to Banff, Alberta in Canada. In Banff she learned to ride a bicycle, got her own horse, and started writing stories. Though she rarely climbs on a bike any more, she still writes every day and rides her horses as often as possible. After living in various communities in Canada, Nikki settled on a small farm just outside Victoria, British Columbia. When she isn't travelling (a passion she developed during her globe-trotting childhood), she enjoys spending time with her dogs, cats, horses, goats, and birds.

A Note from the Author

When several of my friends described how they had been arrested for protesting the clearcutting of public forests in British Columbia, I was dumbfounded. How could ordinary citizens be tossed into jail for peacefully protesting government policy? As I

learned more about the environmental activists who were ready to risk everything to fight for what they believed in, I knew I had to write a book about the struggles they faced. Many of the incidents described in *Trouble on Tarragon Island* really happened in British Columbia and many of the characters were inspired by the real people who continue to defend the last of our old growth forests. Heather was the perfect character to explore these issues with me. She was horrified when I told her her grandmother was going to pose nude for a calendar. Heather wanted to quit school and move back to Toronto when vandals defaced her locker and Matt was the one who told me he was going to stay out on the logging road with the protestors.

Yes, it is true that characters take on lives of their own. I hear them talking to me and, I confess, more than once I have answered them out loud. I hope you enjoy the stories these characters want to tell - I love the process of taking an idea, giving it to a character, and then seeing what happens. I can't really imagine a better job, can you?

Nikki Tate

Books by Nikki Tate

Non-fiction

Double Take: A Biography of Karen Brain, Fall 2007

Behind the Scenes with a Horse Vet, Fall 2007

Behind the Scenes at the Racetrack, 2007

Young Readers

Jo's Journey, Orca Books, 2006

Jo's Triumph 2002

Picture Book

Grandparents' Day, 2004

The Estorian Chronicles

Book I: The Cave of Departure, 2001

Book II: The Battle For Carnillo, 2003

StableMates

Book 1: Rebel of Dark Creek, 1997

Book 2: Team Trouble at Dark Creek, 1997

Book 3: Jessa Be Nimble, Rebel Be Quick, 1998

Book 4: Sienna's Rescue, 1998

Book 5: Raven's Revenge, 1999

Book 6: Return to Skoki Lake, 1999

Book 7: Keeping Secrets at Dark Creek, 2002

Tarragon Island Novels

Book 1: Tarragon Island, 1999

Book 2: No Cafes in Narnia, 2000

Book 3: Trouble on Tarragon Island, 2005

Other Projects:

Family Museum Guide (Royal British Columbia Museum)

The American Life, Tahaus Publishing, Tokyo, 1990

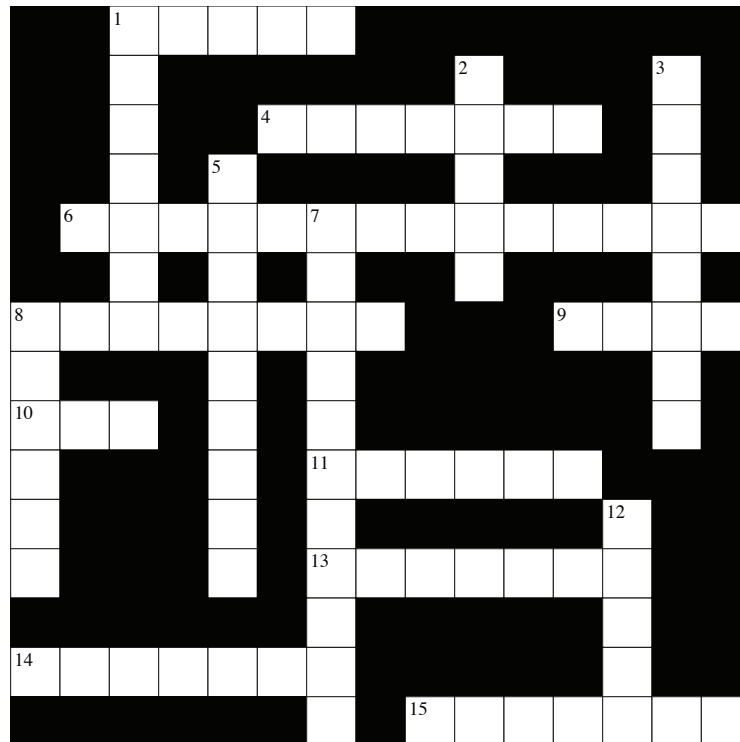
Websites

www.stablemates.net

www.nikkitate.blogspot.com

www.sononis.com

Just for Fun: Crossword Puzzle



ACROSS

- 1. without clothes
- 4. sleeping place
- 6. Heather's island
- 8. logger's tool
- 9. where criminals stay
- 10. what a cow says
- 11. here trees grow
- 13. head of the classroom
- 14. story in a newspaper
- 15. Sat and Sun

DOWN

- 1. large waterfall in Ontario
- 2. film
- 3. oil or watercolour
- 5. boss of a school
- 7. grandmother's husband
- 8. take a photo with this
- 12. what you do with a pen

